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INDIA:

Pressure for a Crackdown in the Punjab

Demands by India's opposition coalitions that Prime Minister Gandhi end the communal violence in Punjab probably reflect increasing public support outside Punjab for a decisive crackdown. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Sikh extremists have renewed their violence despite New Delhi's release last week of over 170 members of the moderate Sikh Akali Dal Party. Security forces in Punjab were placed on general alert this week after Sikh terrorists attacked a paramilitary unit and Hindus rioted to protest the assassination of a prominent Hindu editor. The violence has spilled over into the neighboring states of Rajasthan and Haryana. [REDACTED]

One opposition coalition has demanded Gandhi's resignation unless she moves firmly to end the crisis, according to press reports. Members of the other major opposition coalition, whose support comes largely from Hindus in the north, urged Gandhi to send in the Army if the paramilitary forces in Punjab cannot restore order.

[REDACTED] after a survey of public opinion outside Punjab, Indian officials believe most non-Sikhs support the entry of government forces into Sikh temples in Punjab to curb their use as sanctuaries for terrorists. [REDACTED]

Comment: Opposition leaders have been trying to make Gandhi's handling of the Punjab crisis an election-year issue. Gandhi is likely to be particularly sensitive to criticism from Hindus in the north because she needs their votes to offset dwindling support from her traditional southern and Muslim constituencies. [REDACTED]

Gandhi may be forced to adopt tougher measures to curb the use of temples as sanctuaries but will try to avoid the risk of further violence entailed by ordering security forces inside. She will also remain reluctant to send Army units to Punjab, in part because the Indian military dislikes involvement in domestic security problems. [REDACTED]

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